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Bayard vs. Drusilla: The Burden of War and Legacy

The United States as a nation upholds a legacy of pride and nationalism stemming from past generations' struggles for freedom. The right of sovereignty, the declaration of rights, and the battles in which the colonies were thereafter embroiled were all in the name of equality. This united Union held strong in the face of adversity while grasping firmly to the rich inheritance of its forefathers. Yet soon after it earned its freedom, the Union was called into question for denying some of its people that very freedom. Once the adversaries had been dealt with, drastically opposing arguments on how the country should proceed flooded every section of government. Quickly it became apparent that the topic leading the sectionalisation debate between of the North and the South was the continuation or abolishment of slavery. With each side fighting to gain more power and influence, the tension eventually burst and resulted in an all-out civil war. This period of time was one fraught with mass death, domestic hardship, and brutal violence, yet it was also a host to the changing of ideals of Southern identity and legacy. This is the struggle facing Bayard and Drusilla in William Faulkner's novel *The Unvanquished*. Through these characters Faulkner illustrates the importance of shouldering the family legacy as examined through the analysis of traditional gender roles.

The American Civil War was known as the war which not only left the Union fragmented due to battling ideologies but also turned families against one another. The driving force behind the hostile conflict was the question of protecting the continuance of tradition, through the

practice of slavery, or promoting a new direction for society. Throughout the novel Faulkner stresses the importance of traditional family honor and how it is valued above most everything else. The character of Drusilla represents the ideals of the “Old South,” in her enthusiastic willingness to take up arms against the Yankees. The South has been invaded, provoked, and insulted to the very core of its moral code. Tradition states that any disrespect shall not be tolerated, thus leading those involved into an endless cycle of hostile violence and justifiable retribution. Drusilla wholeheartedly upholds this expectation so her disdain, shown as Bayard speaks of two people victimized by his father’s actions, comes as no surprise: “[Bayard:] They were men. Human beings.” [Drusilla:] “They were northerners, foreigners who had no business here” (Faulkner 223). At the first available opportunity, Drusilla heads off into battle in a duty typically seen as heroic and courageous while expected in the Southern Genteel society. Becoming a soldier was the logical course of action and the pinnacle of preserving one’s family’s honor. Bayard is also ingrained with these traditional family values, witnessed in his adherence to the value of status and his early reverence for his father. The novel opens with him being a child who, having been nursed and sustained on these ideas, unquestioningly takes actions that would bring his family honor. The early episode with the shooting of the Union soldier’s horse is an example of how desensitized he is to the expectation of violence. Compelled into action by the murder of Granny, Bayard again falls into the set confines of convention. He hunts down the man responsible, Grumby, and enacts his revenge, then returns with the man’s hand as a token of recompense so Granny can “lay good and quiet” (Faulkner 184). The natural order had been appeased with the taking of blood for blood. Both Drusilla and Bayard undertake the preservation of their families’ honor into their own hands on multiple occasions reaffirming Southern ideals.

Even with all this pressure to strictly adhere to general social conventions and expectations, many end up falling by the wayside during wartime. Most attention is preoccupied with the approaching conflict rather than squandered upon mundane concerns of propriety. Yet once the fighting comes to a close, with wounds nursed and soldiers sent home, society slowly re-orientes itself and reestablishes social control. Drusilla clashes with this predicament head on, with her achieved status of being a soldier and ascribed status of being a woman. The cause that once consumed her with passionate resolve and valued her for her strength, was now condemning her for the exact same reason. The protection of family legacy was not a separate entity from the general consensus of the day, this Southern institution also partook in its own set of gender roles and expectations. Whereas men were honor bound to fight or take action, women were supposed to be more passive and uphold a more personal bodily honor. Virtue was a large component in a family's honor and when "compromised" this indiscretion led to shame or drastic actions as a remedy. Aunt Louisa voices her fears in a letter to a sister she does not know has passed where she mournfully condemns her daughter's indecent actions: "But when I think of my husband who laid down his life to protect a heritage of courageous men and spotless women looking down from heaven upon a daughter who deliberately cast away that for which he died ...why his martyred father's sacrifice was not enough to preserve his sister's good name---" (Faulkner 190). The duality of Drusilla's character is evident in the display of her early freedom versus the later subjection to her unwavering loyalty to the ideals of the Confederacy. Faulkner uses this internal struggle between rigid gender roles to shine a light on the Old South's irreparably flawed way of living. The forced constraints Drusilla faced upon returning home from war was devastating because it was a physical representation of the restraining of a person's potential growth. The irony lies in Drusilla's willingness to fight for an unsound

institution that promotes her disempowerment, which parallels the narrative of the Civil War being fought for the freedom of those in bondage. This eventually leads to the decline in Drusilla's mental health, because the burden of loyalty weighs heavily upon her while her self-interest never completely fades away. This character switch is very apparent in final section of the novel, "An Odor of Verbena". When Bayard arrives to avenge his father's death, Drusilla makes a grand gesture of presenting him with the guns and places a kiss upon his hand. The action itself seems harmless but it is indicative of typical male behavior. Drusilla realized the unconscious behavior was out of her prescribed gender role causing her to cry hysterically with "the laughter spilling between her fingers like vomit" (Faulkner 239). This realization forces Drusilla to recognize the flaws of the system and that they extend to its very core.

Bayard must also face the physical and moral struggles the Civil War presents. This novel is a coming of age story for Bayard, who essentially experiences the world through the lenses of war only. His scope of awareness widens as he grows older, showcasing the racial, status, gender influences that end up molding his character before one's eyes. Bayard has known only the cycle of violence and revenge, watching many close to him fall victim to its embrace. One expects Bayard to follow in his predecessor's footsteps, especially seeing that he was more of an observer for the entire novel, yet Bayard begins to "redefine part of his heritage" even though there are compelling factors wanting him to remain the same (Akin 3). At its close, the Civil War offered a new way of living for the citizens which echo the sentiment of progress or "new honor," although there were those who would not accept this new order, Drusilla was one of them. For the entire novel Drusilla struggled with her family's legacy; seeing Bayard "so easily" step out of its influence and alter its meaning, was seen as insultingly weak. Bayard's mercy towards Redmond was shamefully un-masculine to Drusilla, especially in comparison

with her late husband who epitomized what it meant to be a man: “He [Sartoris] represented the best of the masculine to her, to be ruthless and brave and to demand- to brook to insult, to demand blood for blood, that was exactly what she would have been if she’d been a boy:” (Faulkner). In accordance with Bayard’s gender role, when he hears of his father’s death, his first course of action should have been to enact his revenge. Therefore to Drusilla, Bayard failed uphold the gender roles that would honor the family legacy. This lineage of animosity showcases the mandate of the Old South, so his refusal to fully participate in its practice is groundbreaking. Bayard’s turn from tradition in favor of redefining honor parallels the abolitionist movement during this war. He, as did they, deviated from the previously unquestioned status quo of the day for an alternative than was unprecedented.

The beginning and ending of this novel executes a slow shift of power between Bayard and Drusilla while reflecting the broader conflict between the Union and the Confederacy. The Union gradually dismantles both the physical structures and symbolic nature of Old Southern institutions. At the war’s close, the Union created a new meaning of living while Bayard paved new ground in the “old rigid code of white male honor” (Sharpe para. 1). Seen through the scope of the Confederacy, Drusilla starts off in this novel as a strong force of sheer, stubborn willpower but at its end she is forced into a powerless situation, totally against her will. Both characters experienced personal struggles because of the expectations placed upon them by outside influences. Yet despite both characters practicing behaviors outside of the norm, Drusilla ends up punished while Bayard is rewarded. This could be another way to reiterate the continuation of the Civil War outcomes by highlighting the triumphs of Bayard and the fall of Drusilla. Or, it can be viewed as a commentary on the generally stricter sanctions placed on women in this society

and how it is more accepted for a white man to exercise the freedom of autonomy than it is for a woman.

The Unvanquished broadly covers an array of diverse topics yet defies clarity on any single one. Faulkner condemns violence yet “understands how dangerous notions of romantic chivalry can be, when harnessed to the will to power” (Lowe par. 24). He uses the external strain of the Civil War setting to mirror the internal questioning of loyalties to traditional southern ideals against an individual’s independence. Through the perspectives of the two characters, Bayard and Drusilla, it is apparent how the Civil War affected all levels of society with the widespread introduction of ideological possibilities and a new found identity for those in the South. This novel highlights the importance of family upon an individual’s moral concepts, yet accounts for personal choice in the hopes for societal progression.

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